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OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHVJ #0753/01 0960752
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5830
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/JCS WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUFOAOA/USNIC SARAJEVO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SARAJEVO 000753

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR(DICARLO), EUR/SCE(HOH/FOOKS); NSC FOR
BRAUN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/01/2012

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KAWC](#) [KJUS](#) [BK](#)

SUBJECT: BOSNIA - BOSNIAK POLITICAL LEADERS WARY OF
CROSSING SILAJDZIC ON SREBRENICA

REF: SARAJEVO 706 AND PRIOR

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Classified By: Ambassador Douglas McElhaney. Reason 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On March 29 and April 2, we met separately with Bosniak member of the Tri-Presidency Haris Silajdzic, President of the Party for Democratic Action (SDA) Sulejman Tihic, and President of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) Zlatko Lagumdzija to discuss the situation in Srebrenica and urge them to refrain from making an already tense situation worse by supporting the secession movement. We encouraged all three to focus on practical measures designed to improve socio-economic conditions in Srebrenica. Silajdzic argued that Bosniaks could not ignore the International Court of Justice's verdict that genocide had occurred in Srebrenica and that the verdict must have "consequences on the ground." Tihic and Lagumdzija accepted that Srebrenica's secession from Republika Srpska was unrealistic and agreed that Silajdzic was leading Bosniaks in the wrong direction. Nonetheless, they both said they were unwilling to challenge him given their own political weaknesses. END SUMMARY

Silajdzic: Integrate Us or We Will Radicalize

¶2. (C) Silajdzic warned that Bosniaks cannot ignore the International Criminal Court's (ICC) verdict that genocide was committed in Srebrenica. He accused the international community of putting undue pressure on Bosniaks to "let it go" and focus on the future, but there would be no positive future for Bosnia unless it dealt with its past. His support for Srebrenica's secession from Republika Srpska (RS) simply reflected the will of its residents. Instead OHR was attacking the victims of genocide and "siding with the Serbs." As a consequence, Bosniaks felt more abandoned, isolated, and insecure than at any time since the 1992-1995 war. Bosniaks want to integrate into European society, but if they are "ghettoized," they will become radicalized, Silajdzic warned.

¶3. (C) Ambassador encouraged Silajdzic to offer constructive suggestions for addressing post-ICC concerns among Bosniaks, but warned that nationalist rhetoric would only make the situation worse. Silajdzic suggested that U.S. and Bosnian experts sit down to discuss the ICC verdict and its implications, but added that the verdict must have concrete

consequences "on the ground." The RS goal has been and remains the annihilation of the Bosniaks, he said. Bosnian Serb politicians were striving to keep the RS as autonomous as possible in order to maintain the ethnic cleansing they carried out during the war, and then finally, to secure the RS's annexation to Serbia, Silajdzic continued. Given these goals, Bosniaks will never feel secure in a country so sharply divided along ethnic lines, he concluded.

Tihic: It's Not My Fault

14. (C) Tihic opened the meeting by stressing that Bosniak political leaders were united in their view that Srebrenica should receive special status outside the Republika Srpska. He understood warnings from the international community that it would not tolerate unilateral changes to the Dayton territorial settlement and realized Srebrenica's secession from the RS was unlikely. Nonetheless, Bosniaks would go ahead with their parliamentary motion to change the constitution and create a special district. Bosniaks "had the right" to pursue special status because the ICJ had ruled that genocide had occurred in Srebrenica, and the U.S. had an obligation to support the proposal. Tihic cited the Srebrenica 10th anniversary resolution passed by the U.S. Congress (2005) to justify the second assertion. Tihic claimed that he had tried to calm emotions in and over Srebrenica, but had failed. He blamed Lagumdzija for stirring up SDP councilors in Srebrenica.

15. (C) When pressed by the Ambassador over the politically destructive course upon which he and his fellow Bosniak leaders were embarking, Tihic shrugged. He explained that Bosniaks would label him a traitor if he compromised over Srebrenica. Tihic conceded that Silajdzic was setting the Bosniak political agenda and that much of what Silajdzic was

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advocating was destructive and unrealistic. Tihic argued that his political position was too weak to challenge Silajdzic, however, adding that any compromises had to come from Silajdzic. In response to a direct question from the Ambassador, Tihic acknowledged that he knew the position he and the SDA had staked out on Srebrenica was wrong, but predicted that as Silajdzic failed to deliver on his promises, public support for him would decline. Only at that point would he step in and challenge Silajdzic as well as his own SDA hardliners, Tihic said.

Lagumdzija: Why Should I Take Any Risks?

16. (C) Lagumdzija's comments echoed Tihic's. He acknowledged that he had talked with SDP councilors in Srebrenica before the Municipal Assembly passed its secession resolution, but argued that the councilors' July deadline gave Bosniak political leaders and the international community ample time to defuse tensions before there was a genuine political crisis over secession. He stressed that if the international community "delivered a few things for Srebrenica," it would quickly take the wind out of the sails of the hardliners. Lagumdzija conceded that secession was wrong and the political movement behind it counterproductive, but said he was not politically strong enough to take on Silajdzic - the driving force behind secession. Challenging Silajdzic now, while his political powers were at their peak, would destroy him and the SDP, Lagumdzija continued. He asked how the international community, including the U.S., could expect him and his party to take such a big political risk when they seemed unprepared to deliver a clear, public message to Silajdzic about his destructive behavior.

Comment

17. (C) Our bilateral meetings with the Bosniak political

leadership largely mirrored previous discussions (Reftel). Silajdzic shows no willingness to back off his agenda or work constructively to reach consensus - a word he defines as acquiescence in the face of Serb crimes. Tihic and Lagumdzija recognize that their current political paths will bring no concrete benefits to their constituents, but they are terrified that challenging Silajdzic will destroy their own positions and those of their parties. Instead, they argue, they will split from Silajdzic once it becomes clear to Bosniaks that he cannot deliver and Bosniaks tire of him. They insist that this moment will come well before Silajdzic's agenda makes compromise with the Serbs (and Croats) impossible. We are not so confident. Neither Tihic nor Lagumdzija are a profile in political courage. We may need to find ways to press them towards a divorce with Silajdzic.

MCELHANEY